

Radicalism  
of the Central  
European  
Countries  
in Response  
to the Immigration  
Issue



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The European Union has been facing a crisis of unprecedented and uncontrolled immigration for over a year now. The main impact was faced by two groups of EU member states. The first group is the *transit countries*, through which the migrants enter the EU, or more specifically the Schengen Area – these are the countries of the Mediterranean and South-Eastern Europe (namely: Greece, Italy, Spain and the Balkan states). The second affected group are the *target countries* – namely Germany, Austria, France, United Kingdom and the Scandinavian states.

**D**ue to the mounting pressure on these two groups, the EU proposed a quota-based mechanism for dividing the burden of migrants proportionally among the member states based on their size and capacity. This has, however, been met with a growing wave of anti-immigration populism, stemming from the rhetoric of the governments of: Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

The presented article examines the political and ideological sources of this populism and radicalization, which come from the countries with large Diasporas in other European countries. In order to do so, first some key facts as regards the scale of the migration problem that has sparked the populist response are presented. In the latter part, the article focuses on the sources of anti-immigration rhetoric (economic, cultural and security arguments).

### **SUPPORTERS OF MIGRATION**

The influx of both economic migrants and refugees to the European Union in 2015 and 2016 has initiated a heated debate across many Eu-

ropean countries which have previously not been confronted with such a phenomenon. The humanitarian crisis that has hit not only Syria, but also many countries of the Northern Africa has led to the outburst of migrants and asylum seekers fleeing their homes and entering Europe through the Mediterranean Sea or the countries of South Eastern Europe.

At first, some European countries reacted with a policy of open arms towards those seeking refuge and a start of a new life chapter in the wealthier countries of Europe. Obviously, the supporters of this approach were highlighting the need to help the arriving migrants. The biggest plea on their hands has been the moral argument.

The moral aspect was based primarily on the humanitarian factor of the crisis in the countries from which the migrants and refugees fled, which, in turn, created a moral obligation for the European countries to provide them with shelter. A part of the narrative that affected this was also the post-World War II legacy combined with the colonial memory that created a greater burden of responsibility among the former colonial powers (namely France and the United



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Kingdom). The fate of the people fleeing destitution and poverty in the regions of Africa and Middle East is bound to create stronger sympathies among the domestic population, and thus stronger reactions by the political elites.

Moreover, there were other reasons why the European countries should have understood it as their responsibility to take

serious action in support of the migrants. The European political and military actions in Northern Africa (Arab spring) and the Syrian conflict placed a moral burden on the European countries to come up with a solution for the economic and social distress that struck the region in the aftermath and the problem of mass migration. This has to be seen also in the context of the geopolitical conflict with other key actors playing their role in the North African and Syrian conflicts. Increased Russian involvement from the military side has put increased pressure on the European Union to maintain a position of a credible force that needs to be taken not only seriously as a political actor on the international scene, but also as a positive force among the people of the Middle Eastern and North African regions. If they turn in large numbers to Europe to seek shelter and help in the time of their great need, it has to be taken with utmost seriousness as a sign that Europe is perceived as a beacon of hope and a symbol of economic growth that refugees need. If Europe fails in handling the crisis with competence, it risks losing the entire support in the region and giving up a chance of politically influencing the situation in the Middle Eastern and African countries for the foreseeable future.

The third point that currently is being used by the pro-migration side is the economic argument. Although there are many aspects to it, one of the key discussion topics is that the influx of migrants will provide a new boost to the European economy by generating new demand for products and services, and thus new opportunities for entrepreneurs and employees. However, this could be questioned as a simple example of the "broken window" fallacy and a case of redirected funds in the economy. The further benefit should come from the new labor force entering European countries that would fill the professions that are

in short supply in many European countries. Moreover, as discussed later in this article, the problem of the demographic crisis will affect also the social welfare system that is held dearly by the domestic population.

Even though some countries of Eastern and Southern Europe (Slovakia or Hungary) experience problems with high levels of unemployment, Germany and the UK are currently capable of accepting many new workers from abroad. Even if the qualifications of migrants were not exactly matching the needs of the new countries they settle in, blocking the free movement of people in theory prevents the creation of a better equilibrium of labor force, which is something that the liberal camp should be, after all, fighting for.

Nevertheless, having stated all this, one has to note that not all of the abovementioned arguments are shared by all the parties defending the policy of open borders. At the moment, the movement is comprised of center-right parties (the moderate conservative camp), socialist or social-democrat entities, and some liberal or libertarian groups which focus primarily on the idea of freedom (including freedom of movement) as the key aspect of promoting and advancing human development.

## OPPONENTS OF MIGRATION

It is extremely difficult to define the group that opposes the migration in the public debate as its members are almost equally represented across all political affiliations. Many center-right parties in Central and Eastern Europe have toughened their rhetoric against migrants even though they have not been known for this previously. The moderate conservative (but generally rather pro-European) nature of these parties has been replaced by a more hardline statements calling for the protection of the national interests and of the traditional cul-

ture in order to create an image of competence and reliability in the face of the current instability.

Similarly, the new populist left- or right-leaning parties joined the ranks of the radical nationalist groups and came out with a more nationalistic rebranding of their manifestos. Among these, UKIP could serve as one of the examples of a populist party adopting a nationalistic approach to politics in their recent electoral efforts. The key focus of their arguments is pointing to the need to protect workers and the stability of social system for the domestic population. However, even within the libertarian camp, there is a strong and growing political opposition to the immigration based on the protection of property rights.

The argument focuses on the fact that in the absence of state and public property, each country would simply be a collective of private properties. Thus neither economic migrants, nor asylum seekers would or even should be allowed to enter a country as people should only enter a private property if the owner of that property consented to this by him/herself. In order to make a clear distinction from other groups, it shall be referred to as a *protectionist and nationalist camp* – although at risk of somewhat simplifying its merits – to avoid the problem of automatically associating the anti-immigration rhetoric with any specific political brand.

The protectionist and nationalistic forces radicalized the debate surrounding possible solutions to the crisis Europe is now facing. They shifted the focus away from the situation of migrants to three theoretical concepts, which the nationalists could use in their favor. These are a cultural argument, a security argument and an economic argument.



THE CURRENT SITUATION MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE EU TO CHECK WHETHER ECONOMIC MIGRANTS WHO CROSS THE BORDERS ILLEGALLY HAVE THE SKILLS FOR WHICH THERE IS A DEMAND. THE RESULT IS AN UNEVEN INFLOW OF MIGRANTS TO THE COUNTRIES WHERE THEY CANNOT FIND THE MUCH DESIRED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND STABLE EMPLOYMENT

The cultural argument of the incompatibility of the cultural heritage and customs of migrants with that of Europe, arose mainly from the scale of the migration affecting Europe, although it also centers on various other contributing statements.

The security argument is often driven by the experience of terrorist attacks and the subsequent reactions of the domestic population. The last year's tragedy of the *Charlie Hebdo* and the Paris attacks was the main fuel in this direction.

The argument about the economic impact of the influx of immigrants often takes last place in such debates – this is, however, precisely why it needs to be tackled first. At the time of the very fragile post-crisis of 2008 recovery in many European countries, the uncontrolled influx of low-skilled migrants and asylum seekers is seen through the lens of the economic gains and losses that these people can bring. The first part of this article will thus summarize key facts about the current situation related to the inflow of migrants (with the distinction between economic migrants and refugees) to the EU. The term “migrants” shall be therefore understood as all people who cross the border of the European Union in order to settle in any of the member countries – therefore it encompasses both, the refugees from the areas of armed conflicts, as well as economic migrants.

### **THE KEY ECONOMIC FACTORS PRESENT IN THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE**

Firstly, it is necessary to focus on the number of migrants who arrived in the European countries since the beginning of 2015. In January 2016, this number surpassed one million immigrants. However, this figure will most certainly not be final. According to the statements made by the Justine Greening, British State Secretary

for International Development and by the European Union, further deterioration of the continuing humanitarian crisis in Syria and other conflicts in the vicinity of the European Union could result in three million more migrants. It is also expected that the migrants from conflict-affected countries will not be able to return to their home countries for the next twenty years. Therefore, the protectionist and nationalist politicians are warning about the potentially four times greater impact than the current situation, which many countries consider to be already unmanageable.

Another strong talking point used by the nationalist camp is that migrants are coming from different countries, which affects not only their economic and social status, but also the readiness to integrate into mainstream society through employment (due to different linguistic skills, literacy and work habits). According to Eurostat statistics, between January and October 2015, the largest number of asylum seekers came from Syria (nearly 180,000 applicants), followed by Afghanistan (app. 83,000 applicants), Kosovo (over 60,000), Iraq and Albania (over 50,000). The top ten (with the number of asylum seekers between 12,000 to 30,000 applicants per country) is complemented by Pakistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, Serbia and Ukraine. Thus, it may be difficult to apply one single solution to integrate all different groups. The solutions sufficient to integrate migrants from Ukraine may be insufficient for migrants from Africa due to other hurdles that will need to be overcome.

In this situation, it should be noted that migrants are divided into different groups based on their motives of arrival. The first group is refugees who are fleeing a conflict or try to avoid the risk of persecution. In this respect, the majority of political leaders (even within the nationalistic camp) in-

deed believe that it is absolutely essential that Europe takes a principled stand based on respect for the founding principles of the European countries.

At the same time, a large proportion of people streaming into Europe are people seeking a better life – economic migrants. This is often the reason why the radical and nationalist camp opposes the current levels of migration to Europe. On the one hand, economic conditions can also be a legitimate reason for migration not just from the point of view of migrants, but also for the European countries. This is mainly about the problem that bothers Europe in terms of an aging domestic population and thus decreasing the economically active part that is financing the welfare state mechanisms of the past. The labor shortages in various specific fields are also a growing problem in many European countries. The increased supply of the laborers could provide an answer to the issues faced by many countries and at the same time would not affect the unemployment rates in the negative direction.

Nevertheless, the way to address these problems is through legal forms of migration. The legal method of receiving foreign migrants in the European Union is beneficial if Europe wants to maintain a number of very significant advantages of the prior EU arrangements.

First of all, through legal migration Europe retains control over which people it receives and in what quantities. The current situation, however, made it impossible for the EU to check whether economic migrants who cross the borders illegally have the skills for which there is a demand. The result is an uneven inflow of migrants to the countries where they cannot find the much desired economic opportunities and stable employment.



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Moreover, the current form of uncontrolled migration also creates pressure and instability in the Schengen Area. The result is that individual nation states have considered/implemented temporary restrictions aimed at rebuilding their state borders. This means that a further continuation of uncontrolled migration would create a significant negative impact on the economies of the EU due to the cracks in the free movement of people and goods between its member states.

What is more, there are also other direct negative economic impacts on the countries receiving asylum seekers and economic migrants. German officials have calculated that the initial annual cost of accommodation and care of one migrant amounts to approximately EUR 12,500 per year. The Federal Republic of Germany estimates that this year they will spend more than EUR 5 billion on migrants – roughly twice as much as compared to the last year. According to the data from the International Monetary Fund, this must be added to the extra costs of social transfers in the form of unemployment benefits and other measures for those migrants who are not economically active. It must be said that these costs are not as high as often stated by the populist leaders – they would account for about 0.1% of total spending each year. Thus, in case of the expected long-term nature of the migration crisis, the major economic impact on EU countries (especially those receiving the highest number of immigrants) will have to accommodate and meet the basic needs of migrants in the form of initial costs.

#### **IMPACT OF MIGRANTS ON THE EU LABOR MARKETS**

In light of the key economic factors mentioned above, it seems however that over the long run, the main issue to be tackled by the recipient countries will be associated with the ability to integrate migrants into respective labor markets. The issue of employment can be analyzed from different perspectives. On the one hand, it is true that the impact on wages of domestic workers is either none or only minimal. Such impact mainly concerns workers in low-skilled jobs, as migrants tend to have lower levels of education and professional skills. As a result, the domestic low-skilled workers will face increased competition, which may reduce their wages or otherwise force them to move to professions with higher qualifications.

It will be always emphasized by the radical and nationalistic parties that immigrants and refugees in particular (due to a special status) have a systematically lower participation rate in the labor market compared to the domestic population. Based on the data of the Cologne Institute of Economic Research analyzing the long-term situation in Germany, which has been known for the admission of large quantities of labor migrants (mainly from Turkey), it can be seen that out of the migrants who settled in Germany between 1985 and 2013, 73% of men and 48% of women are economically active. This is considerably less than in the case of the domestic population, where this rate goes up to 83% of men and 73% of women. Similarly, negative results come from the unemployment statistics, according to which the unemployment rate among foreigners is triple the level (13.6%) compared to the domestic population (4.5%).

A similar experience is shared by other countries of the European Union. According to the data from the International Monetary Fund, due to the current trend of slow labor market integration which can be expected among refugees and immigrants, unemployment will be higher by 30 percentage points compared to the native population. It is estimated that by 2020 this difference would be reduced to 24 percentage points. One of the key factors reducing the gap between the economic migrants and asylum seekers in comparison to the domestic population is the time that immigrants and refugees spend in a new country. With time they will improve their language skills, have greater work experience and social ties helping them to become integrated as a part of the majority population.

From this perspective, the protectionists and radicals point to the differences between various types of immigrants to Eu-

rope. Migrants from wealthier countries or with better linguistic skills have a much higher chance of succeeding in the labor market in a new country. The least successful in integrating are the refugees and also women. Finally, the IMF analysis also shows that the successful integration of large numbers of immigrants and refugees is achieved if the state promotes flexible labor market conditions. A great part is played by the legislative barriers to employment of economic migrants and asylum seekers. As it blocks many of them from entering the labor force legally, the immigrants may be discouraged from work and resort to the welfare system as their only option.

This argument has to be weighed against the positive aspects of migration. These are, however, much more long-term in nature and require a theoretical approach backed by a set of promises that are difficult to underpin with hard data. In brief, what Europe needs now are many young people capable of joining Europe's aging labor force and a vision of new generations that will improve the poor demographic prospects that the Old Continent is currently facing. The opportunity to offer migrants new homes would save Europe from waking up very soon to the drastic reality of the near future, in which the current welfare state systems would become unsustainable.

Furthermore, some of the European countries require a new influx of labor force with a given set of skills that is in low supply. Opening the borders would enable a greater equilibrium of labor and bring a new possible push for open markets with the migrants' host countries, which could boost the demand for European goods and thus provide a new impetus for the European industries. The key reason behind this is a wider division



of labor, which is helping to bypass the trade barriers and increase production per capita.

In the past, a similar situation of the influx of new people into the labor force took place when women started entering the workforce. Back then, contrary to the wider expectations, the situation caused only slight frictional unemployment and resulted in some displaced workers, but overall contributed greatly to the per capita income. The same will happen in the case of accepting migrants in Europe. Thus, any claim stating that migrants create unemployment uses the same logic as the argument that trade makes us poorer. The need to cater to the coming migrants combined with the skills that these people possess is a solid foundation in favor of the new employment opportunities.

### **COSTS AND BENEFITS OF ACCEPTING MIGRANTS IN THE EU**

The final economic argument in this debate is the question of benefits or the cost of migration for the countries, from which these people flee to Europe. It has been pointed out that due to emigration, the countries of Africa and Middle East may lose their best and most skilled people who will leave and not return. The *brain drain* has been an argument previously brought to attention in many Central European countries. There are, however, two sides to this coin.

While some people may leave the countries with no intention of going back home, most of the people who leave send back remittances, which are probably the best way to alleviate the desolate economic situation in the developing world. They carry with them neither the threat of perverse incentives as may NGO aid, nor the risk of corruption associated with foreign aid. While it has been often argued that it is imperative for the country's development to

be able to keep the most qualified people in, it may not have to be so. Most of the developing countries are not able to provide the best form of development of their human capacities to the brightest minds. Thus, it may be just best for these people (and in fact for the country as well) to have the talent developed, where it can be done best. Then, if the people return, they can help the country in person – otherwise they will likely help with their finances. Free trade is the best way to help develop a country and free movement of people is a step in the right direction.

### **REPERCUSSIONS OF THE ECONOMIC FACTORS**

Summing up the rationale behind the economic aspects of the current immigration debate in Europe, it should be said that this is often seen as the key battleground, in which the European authorities have to win hearts and minds of the people in Europe. Currently, this is a battle that has been mismanaged by the defenders of the immigration as they allowed the opponents to hijack the negative economic aspects by looking at the short-term losses. These can be more easily seen by the public, which plays into the atmosphere of fear that got a hold of Europe. This, in turn, drove many of the traditionally moderate and open-minded center-right European parties to the position of defending protectionism for the sake of rallying political support.

Such was the case for example in Slovakia, where after the start of the migrant crisis virtually all parties of the center right, including the liberal Freedom and Solidarity party, stood against the policy of accepting migrants and asylum seekers in the wake of the current refugee and humanitarian crisis. The reason for this political maneuvering was a strong anti-immigration position of the governing social-democratic party SMER-Social Democracy (Direction-Social

Democracy). The only party that resisted the temptation to compete with the policy of the Social Democrats was the party representing the Hungarian Minority called Most-Híd.

### **SECURITY ARGUMENTS IN THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE**

The reason why the anti-immigrant rhetoric works is not in itself surprising. The economic side of the argument is used just as a justification for other factors, which are the key in defining and shaping the public perception in the Central European countries.

One of the most important factors in generating the fear from the issue of migrants is the security concern. There are a number of incidents that the media and the radical camp have dwelled upon to spread the atmosphere of the lack of safety and security that would be associated with the acceptance of migrants and refugees.

The initial outcries of the outright radical or neo-fascist parties such as Jobbik in Hungary or Golden Dawn in Greece have been gradually adopted by the center-right and populist left-wing countries. The language of security and safety has been used even by the government of the Polish Civic Platform as a precondition to the acceptance of migrants and asylum seekers from the Middle East and African countries. The use of the security theme strengthened in the aftermath of the electoral change.

Two aspects drove this fear. The first one was the fear of the unknown. The prospect of the potentially hundreds of thousands of people entering a territory, of which they knew little about and had little attachment to, created a sensation that this is a major threat to the property and physical safety of its current residents. The fear was fueled by the prejudice that the asylum seekers

and migrants have no understanding of the basic liberties and property rights that we hold in high regard in Europe. This was associated with unfounded or carefully picked and highlighted stories about the migrants attacking the drivers or the households in the transition countries, which were then mimicked by the politicians who used it to further reinforce the sense of insecurity.

The election campaign of the SMER-Social Democracy governing party in Slovakia is dominated by the slogan: "We protect Slovakia" – a clear sign of what is a key topic that currently resonates with the public. The same sentiment was expressed by the Czech Minister of Interior Milan Chovanec representing the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) – when he addressed journalists after an informal meeting of the EU interior ministers, he said that security is a priority in tackling the migrant crisis.

### **TERRORISM, SEXUAL ASSAULTS AND DISEASES**

The second issue contributing to the highlighting of the security aspect of the migration from Middle East are the cases of terror attacks in Paris and sexual violence that occurred in Germany last year. This wave of attacks has been contributing to the acute feeling persistent in Central Europe that with the massive immigration entering our continent, the threat of terrorism was no longer just a distant reality, but a threat that could actually take place in the vicinity or directly in the region.

Contributing to the fear of the unknown was thus the aspect of the fear of immigrants as potential terrorists and criminals, who shall be controlled and who, in most cases, are probably guilty. This was best illustrated by the new anti-terrorism legislation passed in Slovakia which restricts certain freedoms in order to provide the police and the justice system with bet-

ter tools to prevent any potential attacks in the future. Slovak Minister of Interior Robert Kaliňák commented on the passing of this law with the statement that the restriction of personal freedom of the incoming migrants is one of the conditions of the successful management of the crisis. The containment and control of the migrants outside of the EU's borders (or at least in Greece as a peripheral country) could, at the same, time help Europe control who enters the European Union and alleviate the fears and support for radical politicians (such as Kaliňák) who milk these sentiments.

The same situation of the increased language of security concerns towards the migrants happened also in Poland and Hungary with the two populist governments that found themselves partners in their rhetoric. Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the ruling party Law and Justice, warned before the election that immigrants and asylum seekers could bring diseases such as cholera or dysentery to Poland and Europe, as well as parasites that could impact the citizens of Poland. Furthermore, he said that Poland could be forced to accept up to 100,000 Muslims. These statements, while harshly criticized by the Civic Platform party and the media, managed to create a sense of concern among the population. Once the Law and Justice party took office, the purely rhetorical statements were in many ways put into reality coupled with anti-liberal reforms and personnel appointments which have raised concerns among European governments and commentators. Faced with a wave of international criticism, the government of the Law and Justice found one critical ally in Europe – namely the Fidesz government and its Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Unlike his Polish counterpart, Viktor Orbán has much more solid popular support for populist and nationalist state-

ments and sentiments. The reason for this goes back all the way to the end of World War I, when Hungarian opposition towards Europe and its elites started due to the nature of the post-war settlement that decimated the former Hungarian territories into its current shape. The Hungarian PM openly called for the establishment of a new illiberal state built on national foundations. Measures were immediately taken in this direction, such as the limitation of the powers of the constitutional court to strike down laws passed by the parliament. A very similar direction, though through different measures, was taken by the Polish government of Beata Szydło, which has invalidated the choice of five constitutional judges appointed by the previous parliament (which also happened not without controversy).

Further measures to control the public media were adopted in both countries to ensure that there is no strong criticism, but rather positive propaganda that reaches masses of people to promote the governmental actions. The issue of uncontrolled migration played into the hands of these parties as they can rally effectively new supporters around this issue, and thus divert attention from the justified criticism in other areas. Moreover, in the clash between European liberal values and radicalized nationalism, the topic of mass immigration swayed support away from the liberal camp.

To summarize, the question of security has been a strong factor in the increased radicalism of all four countries of Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland). The arguments about the need for security were only scarce and ineffective as there was really no reliable data that could be used to oppose this often purely emotional appeal.



THE CURRENT STRONGLY CONSERVATIVE AND SOCIALIST-CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL PARTIES ARE RALLYING AROUND THE ISSUE OF MIGRANTS TO RAISE SUPPORT FOR IMPOSING LIMITATIONS ON FREEDOMS AND THE RULE OF LAW, WHICH WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE IN ANY OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES

The only way to fight radicalism would be to provide an effective defense of the principle of individual freedoms and the presumption of innocence, while ensuring that the public order remains intact or at least affected only in the minimum way. The current strongly conservative and socialist-conservative political parties are rallying around the issue

of migrants to raise support for imposing limitations on freedoms and the rule of law, which would not be acceptable in any other circumstances. So similarly to any other type of crisis, liberals and libertarians must be extremely cautious and resilient in their principled stance for freedom and the rule of law, even if faced with as tough a challenge as the migration crisis. In the face of the strong political push for safety and security, any opposition to this could be quickly condemned as *naïve* at best. Nevertheless, this is the test that the liberal camp must start to tackle seriously.

#### **PROTECTION OF THE NATIONAL CULTURE IN THE FACE OF THE IMMIGRATION CRISIS**

The issue of security is very strongly associated with the fact that migrants are coming from predominantly Muslim countries. The radical and nationalistic camp is extremely quick to point out to the negative impacts and cultural incompatibility that the Muslim migrants faced in France, Sweden or the United Kingdom, and openly state that they will do their utmost to prevent such a situation in their countries. Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary as well as Poland are all relatively homogenous in terms of their domestic population. The fearmongering of the politicians and their claims about the protection of the traditional culture are thus much more likely to find a fertile soil among the population.

The Prime Minister of Slovakia Robert Fico recently issued a number of statements in which he openly spoke against Muslims. When debating the transfer of the refugees from Syria, Fico ensured that only Christian refugees from Syria would be accepted and just a hundred in total. One of the reasons for not admitting Muslim migrants was given by Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák who said that they cannot come to Slovakia because there are no mosques in the coun-

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try – a statement that instantly became infamous and was parodied even outside Europe. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the sexual attacks in Cologne and other German cities, Robert Fico stated that he intends to prevent the creation of a larger Muslim community in Slovakia.

Similar strong statements came from Jarosław Kaczyński, who addressed the issue of migrants in the Sejm stating that the European countries (such as Sweden, Germany or France) which in the past welcomed Muslims, have later experienced the introduction of Sharia laws and the loss of national sovereignty. He used examples where Christian symbols, traditions or even the basic legal norms had to be suspended for the Muslim communities. These communities, in Kaczyński’s words, demand not just a toleration of their traditions and religious laws, but also that other communities and the majority conforms to the principles demanded by Islam.

The majority of the population in strongly Christian countries such as Poland, Slovakia or Hungary reacts very firmly to such imageries and the nationalistic leaders are fully aware of this. The capacity to prevent this situation in Poland is thus seen as a key aspect of the protection of cultural identity of the country. The cultural crusade against the current threat is, however, not just based in the opposition against Islam as such, but also against the left-liberal narrative that has been “attacking” the conservative camp and supporting secularism and multiculturalism at the expense of the national traditions and social hierarchies.

The same approach and the sense of cultural crusade not just against Muslims, but also the “perverse Western liberalism” has also been adopted by Viktor Orbán and Fidesz. The PM openly said that Brussels does not like strong nation states – toward what Hungary is now

aspiring. He opposed the tendencies which he observes among European bureaucrats that every crisis Europe faces needs to have a European solution. The cultural war is thus not just against the threat from the outside of Europe, but against the way that European leaders try to “overlook” the internal differences between the member states and impose a system on them that will prevent them from having control over their own affairs. As the nationalists see themselves as representing the will of the people (having been elected with a relatively strong mandate), they feel they can present this as a struggle for cultural preservation and democratic principles.

Opposition to this line can come from two sides. One, preferred by most left-wingers, is to argue in favor of European values and condemn the nationalist and religious radicalism which results in a threat to basic liberties for all citizens in these countries. The solution, under this argument, would be to strengthen the position of European institutions to ensure certain rights and principles valid across all of the European Union.

Nevertheless, being members of the liberal/libertarian camp, the correct solution as regards the matter should be to say that the state and the European institutions should play no role in defining or protecting respective cultures. Instead, it shall ensure that people themselves have all their rights, including religious and cultural freedoms protected and treated equally. At the end of the day, this is where the marketplace of ideas should play its role. However, as in the previous cases, libertarian views are not being defended strongly enough and with skillful precision to handle the counterarguments from both the nationalist and Euro-centric sides.

## CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, this article presented three main battlegrounds (economy, security and culture), which have worked in favor of

the new radicalized populist and nationalist camp in the past year and the debate that surrounded the migrant crisis in Central Europe (with the focus on Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary). It depicted the key facts and arguments put forward by the opponents of immigration and how the liberal/libertarian camp should handle them from their perspective.

In all three areas, a strong case has been made by the radicalized politicians of all political options against the acceptance of migrants in the region. Dealing both with these arguments and the rhetoric, often over-simplistic and lacking scrutiny, used by the left-wing camp calling for a stronger European integration as the only alternative to the radical nationalism, poses a great challenge for liberals and libertarians.

It will be up to us to defend the ideas of freedom, rule of law and tolerance, at the same time ensuring their high esteem in our societies – even though it may at times seem more convenient to abandon the values at stake in the name of a false sense of safety secured by a growing government or a feeling of ever strengthening trust in the European bureaucratic machinery, both of which we used to criticize. ●



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